

00:00:00	April Wolfe	Host	<p>Hey, this is April Wolfe, host of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>. Before we get into the show today, I just wanted to give you a reminder that this is the MaxFunDrive. So, this is your opportunity to become a member and to help support our show specifically, and Maximum Fun more generally.</p> <p>Um, so what you can do is go to MaximumFun.org/join and you can choose a monthly amount that is, you know, comfortable for you right now. A lot of people give five dollars a month or ten dollars a month, but some upgrade to \$20, \$35, or even \$100 per month or more. You know, it's all about what works for you and what's possible for you.</p> <p>And uh, we just want to let you know that we appreciate all of it, and so, here is our show today.</p>
00:00:42	Music	Transition	<p>"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie. Music continues at a lower volume as April introduces herself and her guest, and then it fades out.</p>
00:00:49	April	Host	<p>Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>, where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I'm April Wolfe. Every week, I invite a new female filmmaker on. A writer, director, actor, or producer, and we talk—in depth—about one of their fave genre films. Maybe one that's influenced their own work.</p> <p>And uh, you guys know, like, it's a little bit weird today. Obviously there's cats in the background today. She's a little bit frisky, so you might hear Chicken. We are recording from our homes. Uh, so there's a little bit of a difference. Um, hopefully you guys won't notice the difference <u>too</u> much.</p> <p>But we also have <u>one</u> big difference, and that's our guest today, and that is actor and creator and kind of all-around maker, Sheila Vand. Hi, Sheila!</p>
00:01:34	Sheila Vand	Guest	<p>Hi! Thanks for having me.</p>
00:01:36	April	Host	<p>Um, so uh, I would love to give people an introduction of what Sheila's done. There's one particular thing I think our listeners are very familiar with, but I think people should know the whole breadth of your work, because it's quite large.</p> <p>So, Sheila was born and raised in California, and attended the UCLA School of Film and Television to study acting and directing, which took her on a peculiar path of hybrid performance and multi-media artistry. She then made her Broadway debut opposite Robin Williams as Hadia in Rajiv Joseph's Pulitzer prize finalist, <i>Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo</i>, starred in the Disney Hall's tenth anniversary LA philharmonic staging of Frank Zappa's <i>200 Motels</i> for Esa-Pekka Salonen, and had her original performance piece, <i>Sneaky Nietzsche</i> mounted at LACMA.</p> <p>Then co-created the award winning visual art series, <i>MILK: What</i></p>

Will You Make of Me? And then uh—oh, that was with TED fellow Alexa Meade, who you’ve done quite a bit of work with, right?

00:02:32 Sheila Guest

Yeah, we’ve collaborated a few times.

00:02:33 April Host

Alright, so that show toured throughout Europe. So this series served as the inspiration for Ariana Grande’s music video for “God Is A Woman”, on which Grande worked with Vand and Meade.

Now, amid all these accomplishments, Sheila has also been acting in a traditional sense, of what we would call Hollywood ways, with roles on TV in *24: Legacy*, *Minority Report*, and *State of Affairs*, along with a breakout role in *Argo* as Sahar, and in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and Ingrid Jungermann’s indie caper, *Women Who Kill*.

A good chunk of *Switchblade* listeners will remember her, however, as the girl in—in Ana Lily Amirpour’s *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*. But, if you are an indie film buff, you’ll know her from *We The Animals*, *Viper Club*, *The Wave*, *Highway*, *Aardvark*, and *Prospect*, and now you’ll catch her in the *Snowpiercer* television series on TNT, and in Dave Franco’s directorial debut, *The Rental*.

The film follows two couples on an oceanside getaway, that grows dark when they suspect the host of their seemingly perfect rental house may be spying on them. Before long, what should have been a celebratory weekend trip turns into something far more sinister. And so Sheila, can you tell us when that’s coming out, how are people gonna be able to see that?

00:03:47 Sheila Guest

Yeah, that’s coming out on July 24th on demand and in some select theaters, and it’ll also be playing at a bunch of drive-in theaters around the country. So it’s a fun movie to see at the drive-in because it’s a horror film, so uh, yeah. It’ll be—it’ll be out there in whatever theaters we’re allowed to play it in and can safely play it in.

00:04:08 April Host

Yeah. *[Laughs]* I mean, uh, then you’ve also got the uh, *Snowpiercer* television series, which was renewed for a second season, and that is—

00:04:18 Sheila Guest

That’s out every Sunday on TNT.

00:04:21 April Host

Wonderful.

00:04:22 Sheila Guest

And also on Netflix international.

00:04:24 April Host

Oh, nice. Um, so Sheila, the movie that you chose to talk about today is one of my favorites, and it is *Possession*. Can you give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films?

00:04:36 Sheila Guest

One of the things I love the most about *Possession* and one of the things that took me back when I first saw it was how explosive the energy is. It is one of the rawest movies I’ve ever seen, and the performances are so heightened and some with such force that I just had never seen something that—that was that um, over the top really. Just going for what it’s going for with full conviction and no apologies.

And I also love that it blends a few different genres together. On the one hand it's this really intense marital drama. On the other hand, it's a horror-suspense film, and there's also this little element of fantasy that gets thrown in with the creature that you discover at the end of the film.

So I like that it brings all these things together. But mostly the performances just slay me every time. I think they're so masterful, particularly Isabelle Adjani's performance in the film. So, uh, yeah, I just love this movie so much. I find it to be like, some kind of poetic explosion of pain.

- 00:05:43 April Host Mm-hm. Yeah, I think that's a really good description of it, because it's—as I'm about to do with the synopsis—it's not easy to describe, I would say.
- Uh, but for those of you who haven't seen *Possession*, today's episode will give you some spoilers, but that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. My motto is that it's not what happens but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching. Still, if you want to pause and watch *Possession* first, this is your shot.
- 00:06:06 Music Music "The Night The Screaming Stops (Opening Titles)" by Andrzej Korzynski.
- 00:06:08 April Host And now that you're back, let me introduce *Possession* with a somewhat short synopsis.
- Okay, written by Frederic Tuten and—[*Chuckles*] and this is gonna be me saying this name again and again—Andrzej Żuławski and directed by Żuławski for release in 1981, *Possession* stars Sam Neill as Mark, a spy just returning from an unspecified trip to West Berlin. Upon his return, his wife, Anna, played by Isabelle Adjani, requests a divorce.
- 00:06:34 Clip Clip **Mark:** You can't just say you don't know. That's what you said on the phone. When will you know?
- Anna:** I don't know!
- Mark:** Do you want me to spend the night somewhere else? In a hotel or something? Do you want us to meet later on? We can talk more calmly. Do you—do you need more time? What—what do you need?
- 00:06:59 April Host He does not understand why, even though she insists that she hasn't cheated. Mark reluctantly leaves, but returns after a bender to find their son, Bob, alone in a disheveled house.
- 00:07:09 Clip Clip **Mark:** What happened? It's daddy.
- Bob:** Mommy said she'd be right back, but she never came. Then Margit called and told me to be brave.
- 00:07:18 April Host He tries to make things work, but Anna takes off. Mark gets a call that Anna is with her boyfriend, Heinrich, so he goes over there and fights Heinrich.

00:07:25	Clip	Clip	Heinrich: We don't have to be brutal to each other, or even impolite. Our situation is like a mountain lake we are trying to swim in, starting from different shores. I'm not astonished you're here. I was thinking about you just before you came, so... Now that you're here, let's be open to each other.
00:07:44	April	Host	Then returns home, where Mark and Anna engage in a vicious brawl with an electric knife in one of the most terrifying scenes of marital— <i>[She breaks off, laughing.]</i>
00:07:51	Sheila	Guest	It's so incredible.
00:07:52	Clip	Clip	<i>[Electric knife whirring.]</i>
			Mark: Anna, help me! Help me!
00:07:57	April	Host	Mark hires a private detective to follow Anna.
00:08:00	Clip	Clip	Mark: I would like you to follow my uh, wife for a few days.
			Zimmermann: Of course.
00:08:05	April	Host	And she leads him to a derelict apartment, where some kind of creature lives. Anna kills the detective, and then when his lover comes to find <u>him</u> , she kills him, too. So, Anna confesses eventually to Mark that she had a traumatic miscarriage in the subway station.
00:08:20	Clip	Clip	Anna: It's as if the two sisters were too exhausted to fight anymore. You know these women wrestling in an arena of mud, with their hands locked at each other's throats. Each waiting to see who'll die first. And both staring at me.
00:08:37	April	Host	And we see a haunting scene unfold of Anna bashing herself into walls, writhing, and ultimately seeping blood all over the floor. Heinrich goes to Anna's other apartment, where he finds body parts stuffed in her refrigerator.
00:08:49	Clip	Clip	Heinrich: This can't be true.
			Anna: I've got to keep this place clean and well.
			Heinrich: Oh, my god.
			Anna: Are you going to help me, Heinrich?
00:09:00	April	Host	And then Anna attacks <u>him</u> , but he is actually able to escape.
			Here's where things get to be maybe a lot. Mark then kills Heinrich in a bar and stages it as a suicide. He drags a corpse inside his apartment, and then fucks Anna in their old kitchen, before visiting Heinrich's mother, who then kills <u>herself</u> while he's there. Things are off the rails.
			Then Mark comes upon a standoff with the cops outside of his apartment building, and stages a distraction to help someone he thinks is Anna escape from the apartment. He flees, and Anna follows him into a building, where she reveals that, hey, you know what, it's done. The monster she's been feeding has now been

transformed into Mark's doppelganger.

- 00:09:41 Clip Clip **Anna:** I wanted to show it to you. It is finished now.
- 00:09:45 April Host He tries to kill his doppelganger, but the couple is gunned down by the authorities, but the doppelganger then escapes through the roof. Shortly after, there's a knock on the apartment door, where the child, Bob, is being babysat by his teacher, Helen, who is Anna's doppelganger. Then we see Bob floating face down in the bathtub with Mark's doppelganger partially obscured and Helen staring onward with blazing green eyes.
- I—uh.
- 00:10:11 Sheila Guest So much. So much to unpack.
- 00:10:12 April Host There's a lot, yeah. Writing that synopsis, I was just like, "What do I include? Do I include Heinrich's pants and his fighting style?"
- [Both laugh.]*
- What—I mean like, what's the important thing here? So, um, to start, I want to talk about Isabelle Adjani, because you said, of course, this is like, you know, kind of her starting vehicle. Sam Neill is amazing as well. Like, they're—
- 00:10:36 Sheila Guest Yeah, absolutely.
- 00:10:37 April Host —every person in this is performing at a high caliber. But of course, Isabelle Adjani is like, kind of this mysterious creature that we're watching and following through these things. And of course the subway scene is you know, iconic and has kind of turned into a meme. As an actor, she's imbuing, I think, this character with a certain kind of self-sabotage that she had at the time in her own life.
- Because Żuławski said that, quote, "When she saw the film, I mean, she wen tot the bathroom, took a shaver—the one you use every day with two blades—and she tried to commit suicide by cutting her wrists. Which is maybe not very serious, but it caused me quite a headache. I thought I was responsible, the one to blame. Someone plays in one of my films and then is going through something like that, that means I didn't notice something, that I wasn't able to protect her. I told her, 'Listen, you'll see. I will be persecuted for this film, because it's going quite far, and people don't like to be brutalized and touched so much through the screen. But you, you will get all possible acting awards, and your career will start again.' And that's exactly what happened." End quote.
- And so it's just like, dealing with an actor who also had those vulnerabilities, and it could not be not put onto the screen, I think, in who she is. And you know, I think it's just—in terms of casting—it's just excellent casting of this person who you know, might have had these things going on in her life at the same time, the self-sabotage and the self harm, and then she puts it into this film. And you can feel it. There's a visceral sense of that, and um—
- 00:12:15 Sheila Guest Absolutely. Yeah, she gives all of herself to this movie, and I don't

know that the movie would have worked without that. And Sam Neill does, too. I had read that Żuławski really encouraged them to attack their roles, and there was, I think, a reviewer at the time when it came out who compared the film to Japanese theater, which I think is such a good comparison. It's like so heightened, and the melodrama.

I feel like Żuławski takes the subtext of this story and guts it out, and then slathers it on top of the plot, which is something that I really like. I know also when it first came out a lot of people thought that it took itself way too seriously, and it does, but that's like, what I love about it as well. It's part of what makes it so fun is, like I said, it's just—it goes for what it's going for with full conviction, and she does as well. And like you said, it transpires through the screen. You can really see how much she's giving, and that kind of performance work is some of the most satisfying, but it is also sometimes the hardest to process and leave behind.

Because when you give that much, when you go there into those dark spaces, I don't know. I still feel like I'm figuring out and learning how to leave the work at home, and the more I care about a project, the more I care about a role, the harder it is to let it go when the movie's over. So it's—it's sad. I had read that as well, that she had tried to commit suicide after the movie. Um, and I really appreciate Żuławski saying—taking some ownership over that and saying you know, "Maybe there was something I didn't notice, maybe I didn't protect her well."

Because sometimes I do feel like filmmakers will expect quite a lot from their actors, depending on what the script calls for, and maybe don't realize, "Oh, I need to kind of do the follow through and make sure that this isn't fucking them up, and this isn't tearing them apart." But again, that's like part of the psychic thing that we do that's like—it's hard to explain to other people, what it's like to go that far into yourself. But for me, it's like watching it, it's a gift that she gives us to—it's a lot, you know. It's not a movie, I think, most people want to watch more than once, even though I've seen it many times.

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| 00:14:35 | April | Host | Ooh, yeah. I'm— <i>[Laughs.]</i> |
| 00:14:36 | Sheila | Guest | Um, but for me, I'm such a person of extremes. Like, I feel life very intensely, and I'm very sensitive to life, very emotional person. So I think also when I saw this movie I was like, "Oh god." Like, it was—for other people it might be like a punch in the face, and for me it was kind of a sigh of relief that I felt. It was just like, oh, to just—to just <u>see</u> all of these feelings, right in my face, instead of uh, this more subdued, really repressive kind of naturalism that I think film has been in for the last couple of decades. And even just like, societally, this—like, I became an adult in this internet world, and there is a lot of just phoniness and plastic. And when I saw this movie, it pierced right through all that shit with no apologies. |
| 00:15:29 | April | Host | Yeah. And you know, I think you're talking about, too, the fact that like, this—you know, people maybe though it took itself too seriously. But that was part of the point, because this was based on |

Żuławski's private life.

And he said, quote, "The film was my private life, which just exploded. I had no home, no family. My wife, the mother of my son, went away with a guy like Heinrich. This total disruption that happened in a very banal situation, just a couple breaking up, was a strong motivation for the rest of the story." End quote.

And so, I think you know, he's trying to heighten the, like, "This is what you feel like when you're going through a breakup." It's dumb. I mean, it's like silly. Everyone goes through a breakup. But it doesn't negate the fact that you feel like the world is ending, that there is like—[Laughs] a monster who's taken over your bed. And so I think he's trying to render that on the screen, those feelings. And for me, it works.

00:16:25 Sheila

Guest

Yeah. Absolutely, it's just—it's all very metaphorical, and filled with poetry for me. And I also read that, I believe Żuławski was in exile at the same time that he was going through this really ugly divorce. So, he was cut off from so many elements of his identity, as his family was falling apart, his home life, his—he was banned from his home country. So I can only imagine the crisis he was going through, and I love movies that stem from a personal place for the filmmaker.

I—it's uh—the um, the things that I write myself are all about an exploration of my own issues I'm working out, my own pain. So I think that's probably another reason why I love this movie so much, is 'cause I know how personal it is for him. And even the moments that are, quote—quote-unquote "taking themselves too seriously", are maybe a bit over the top, uh, they feel pure to me. They feel just completely raw, and it's like you said, when you are going through a breakup, even if you know you're gonna get through it, it really can feel like the end of the world.

And I—I appreciate how even though it's kind of Isabelle Adjani's character who is doing the breaking up, you're seeing how difficult it is for her, and how disturbed she is just to leave a man. And I think there is something really feminist in there, especially considering this was made back in 1980, of why is it this difficult for a woman to leave a man? She should be allowed to do that freely. And there are these amazing moments in the film that are possessive [Chuckles] and why I think the movie is called *Possession*, is that these—all of these men want her. Everybody is kind of trying to take a piece of her, and what I see is a woman just desperately trying to be alone for a moment, to figure out what's happening with herself.

And there's a line that Sam Neill, who plays her husband, says multiple times. He—it's something along the lines of um, "It'll be how you want it," He keeps telling her. He wants her to stay with him so badly, and he just kept saying, "It'll be how you want it, it'll be how you want it." And then you just see her face like completely break down as he says it, because how she wants it is to not be with him. And I don't think he even realized—like, he thinks he's being um, accommodating, you know? He's like, "I'll change, I'll do whatever you want." And to me, that is a form of male possessiveness. It's

like, you have to just let the girl, the woman go. She doesn't want to be with you anymore. And um, but that doesn't mean it's easy for the woman to do that.

00:19:13	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:19:18	April	Host	So, we're gonna take a quick break, and when we come back we'll talk <u>more</u> <i>Possession</i> and uh, and a ton of weird stuff. We'll be right back. <i>[Music fades.]</i>
00:19:29	April	Promo	Hey, this is your host, April Wolfe, and uh, I wanted to talk to you about the Max Fun Drive. But, uh, first I feel like we <u>really</u> have to check in with producer Casey, who is uh, in the hospital recovering from a tragic um, stabbing. Which I think maybe you heard on our last episode. He had inherited a Fabergé egg, and—Casey, can you—can you—can you see us?
00:19:54	Casey O'Brien	Promo	<i>[Sound of heart monitor beeping.]</i> April? April, is that you?
00:19:58	April	Promo	Y-yes, yes! It is!
00:20:00	Casey	Promo	<i>[Sobbing]</i> They took my egg! They—
00:20:05	April	Promo	<i>[Emphatic]</i> <u>What?</u> !
00:20:06	Casey	Promo	—took my egg! Yes, I know! I told the tabloids that nothing was stolen, but they took it! My Fabergé egg, they took it! And I don't know who it was who stabbed me, but some mysterious figure entered my room, stabbed me, and then took my Fabergé egg.
00:20:24	April	Promo	Casey.
00:20:25	Casey	Promo	I know.
00:20:26	April	Promo	On top of everything else!
00:20:28	Casey	Promo	You know, I have a few leads. You know, like I said last time, that uh, I inherited this Fabergé egg and it's caused a rift between my ex-wife and me and my ex-wife's nephew and me and my step brother and me and the caretaker at Nana's house and me and especially Drea Clark of the <i>Who Shot Ya?</i> podcast, so it's just—ugh, it's tough right now, but I'm doing okay.
00:20:49	April	Promo	Oh, I'm sorry.
00:20:50	Casey	Promo	Yeah, thank you. I appreciate that. I'm doing okay, and I just—all I want to talk about is the MaxFunDrive. And I think you do, too.
00:20:58	April	Promo	I—yeah, I do, and you know, not to be insensitive, Casey. I'm—
00:21:03	Casey	Promo	Thank you. It's really gonna help my healing—
00:21:04	April	Promo	—I feel you.
00:21:05	Casey	Promo	—to talk about it, frankly.

00:21:07	April	Promo	<p>I just—it's just that you know, we have—we've got a show. Um, so, you know, for this show, you know, the MaxFunDrive is what supports us to make this show, and you know, we know that there is a lot of entertainment, a lot of other things that you could be giving to, and we're so happy that you are.</p> <p>But we are, you know, we're also very interested in um, seeing who can join us in helping make the show better and bigger every year, and this is your shot to—to join and to become a part of the show and what makes us special.</p>
00:21:43	Casey	Promo	<p>Yeah, no, I mean, our show doesn't—like, <u>literally</u> doesn't exist without people becoming Max Fun members and choosing <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> as the show they want to donate to, um, and give money to. That's how we make our money to make this show, and our show is very unique. There are no other shows like this, and the people who help us are helping make it exist and putting it out in the world. So we're just so appreciative, and here's how you <u>can</u> give. Here's how you can help keep this show.</p> <p><i>[April affirms.]</i></p> <p>Um, a Max Fun membership starts at five dollars a month. You get all the bonus content with that, and you'll be able to access that as long as you're a member. Um, if you choose to join with a ten dollar a month amount, you get a Max Fun membersh—you get the bonus content and the Max Fun membership card, a cool pin—which we have a really great pin this year—</p>
00:22:37	April	Promo	<p>I think ours is gonna win this year for sure. I mean, if we don't—we don't play—</p>
00:22:39	Casey	Promo	<p>What do you mean win?</p>
00:22:40	April	Promo	<p>—but, you know. I mean like, I'm a very competitive woman, so. <i>[Laughs.]</i></p>
00:22:45	Casey	Promo	<p>It—I think it's already won, frankly. Um, and uh, you also get the bonus content with that, and everything else. And yeah, put on a pin, and you can see all your switchblade sisters out in the world.</p> <p>If you do \$20 a month or more, you get this year's special gift, which is a Max Fun game pack, with custom dice and custom deck of playing cards, all with Max Fun designs. But you just have to visit MaximumFun.org/join to become a member.</p>
00:23:11	April	Promo	<p>Yeah. Pretty easy. And—</p>
00:23:13	Casey	Promo	<p>Very easy.</p>
00:23:14	April	Promo	<p>—you know, also maybe tell your friends to listen to the show. That helps us, too. But thank you, no matter what, thank you for listening, thank you for becoming a member, and thank you for telling your friends about us and spreading the good word of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>. We, again, cannot do this without you. I mean that from the bottom of my heart.</p>
00:23:35	Casey	Promo	<p>Yes. I think something really cool is like, I've seen a lot of people</p>

listen to our show and say like, it inspired them to be filmmakers. And I just think like, that's so awesome. I just don't think another podcast is doing that right now.

[April affirms.]

Um, I just wanted to add one thing, April. Two things, actually.

00:23:51	April	Promo	What?
00:23:52	Casey	Promo	Um—ooh, my wound. I'm sorry. But uh—
00:23:55	April	Promo	Ugh, it's oozing.
00:23:56	Casey	Promo	So, if you want—it's okay. If you want to support a little bit extra this year, but you can't do a full upgrade, like a full like, five-to-ten dollar, we're doing this thing this year called "boosting your membership" where you can go in between levels. So, if you can give like an extra buck, or another buck, and that goes towards our, you know, upgrading members total.
			It doesn't help with getting the subsequent gifts, like, at the next level, but um, it really helps the show. Even like, another extra buck, if you're able to add to your um, your membership.
00:24:30	April	Promo	Yeah. Every little bit helps.
00:24:31	Casey	Promo	Every little bit helps. And then I also wanted to say there's a special event going on this Saturday, July 25th at 2 p.m. Pacific, we're doing a live watchalong of <i>The Apple</i> , which—with April, and the people over at <i>Who Shot Ya?</i> Ify Nwadiwe, Alonso Duralde, and Drea Clark. You like this movie, right, April?
00:24:49	April	Promo	<i>[Emphatically]</i> Oh, my god.
			<i>[Casey laughs uproariously, and April joins in.]</i>
			I—I—this is, um—this is like, the visual representation of my soul, is <i>The Apple</i> .
00:25:03	Casey	Promo	That's great. So yeah, check that out on uh, July 25th at uh, 2 p.m. Pacific time. Okay, April, thank you for talking to me about uh, the MaxFunDrive. It's actually helped my um, my wound heal a little bit, I think.
00:25:14	April	Promo	Oh, that's so sweet. I'm glad.
00:25:17	Casey	Promo	So, I really appreciate you calling in and—
			<i>[Sound of a door creaking open.]</i>
			Wait. Is someone coming into my hotel—my—my hospital room? Who—oh, no.
00:25:26	April	Promo	Oh, god. Not <u>again</u> .
00:25:28	Casey	Promo	Oh, no! Who is—April, I can't tell who it is. They're wearing a mask, so they're following good COVID procedure, but I don't know

who's—who are you?

[April makes a startled noise. The sound of heels clicking can be heard.]

Please, go away! I don't have the egg! I don't have the Fabergé egg! Oh my god. They're holding a mailbox. It's the mailbox from the movie *The Lake House*. They're raising it above their head—

[There's a series of thuds, and Casey grunts and screams.]

Oh god! Oh no!

00:25:46 April Promo It's a portal to another time! Oh. Oh, no. Casey's been bludgeoned by the mailbox from *The Lake House*!

[Ascending, dramatic musical cue plays.]

I—uh, okay, we're signing off. We'll return back to the show. Thank you so much for listening and becoming a member, and we'll—we'll check in with Casey. I'll give you an update.

00:26:10 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:26:16 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Sheila Vand, and we're talking about *Possession*.

Um, you know, you were talking a lot about the—you know, like, female wanting to leave, wanting to set everything apart, and all the things that this movie is about. But I have to say that when Żuławski, you know, lost his first financier, his first producer for this, he went to Paramount in the U.S. and just said that—to them—"It's about a woman who fucks an octopus." End quote.

[Both laugh hysterically.]

00:26:50 Sheila Guest Ah, if only you could still do that today and get your funding.

00:26:55 April Host *[Through laughter]* But they didn't! They turned him down! They said no! That's like, I mean, honestly today I think that would sell, but—

[They break off and laugh again.]

00:27:06 Sheila Guest Maybe so.

00:27:07 April Host—in 1980, maybe not so much. Um, and uh, and I think you know, it's like—what is this movie all about, and you're saying all these amazing quotes, these beautiful lines that resonate, and you know, uh, what we could think it's about. Żuławski was of the mind that it was very specifically about um, the Berlin Wall, though. Um, and that, however, differs from what his co-writer, Frederic was saying, because they had very different ideas.

Frederic was much more interested in the personal, and Żuławski was more interested in the political. And so the two of them working together, actually, I think, really beautifully married those two things—and pun intended—of um, how they worked together and

what that means.

Um, but the movie does not exist without the Berlin Wall, and I think that anyone who even just sees like, the personal side can maybe um, say that there is an oppressiveness, this certain element about that, that is haunting.

And Żuławski said, “When I wrote the script, I thought I would be really loved to make the film as close as possible to this part of the world in which the film was invented, the communist side of the world. And Berlin seemed exactly the right place, surrounded by the Wall and the communist empire. To have this entrenched psychology of people surrounded by evil, and it finally worms up into their universe as a political statement. I wasn’t shooting the beautiful tower of Berlin, I was shooting the Wall. For reasons, not exactly the background, but for reasons of profound necessity, for the story to unravel, it had to be there.” End quote.

When I think about that background, I’m always wondering how aware the actors are of that when they’re in that place. ‘Cause if I think of, for instance, *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*, like so Ana Lily Amirpour is making like, you know, this very specific backdrop of like, those kind of like, oily things, like uh—and you have like, a desert feel to it.

And I’m wondering, how does that affect performance, you know, this is what you’re living in, this is the world that’s been created for you.

00:29:17 Sheila

Guest

It affects it a lot. It’s one of the things I loved the most about working on location, is that you get to be far away from home, so you can really kind of cut yourself off from your normal life and immerse yourself into your character and the story.

And particularly, a place like Taft, California, where we shot *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*, it has—it’s so dilapidated. It’s such a kind of abandoned Nowheresville. I remember the first time driving into it, just seeing these tumbleweeds roll by, and like you said, those giant oil drilling machines. And it just feels transportive, honestly. It feels like the location itself is the set, and so—of course production design also helps a lot, with transporting yourself.

But I work very much in that way, where I’m very influenced by space, the space around me. And I think sometimes even of my acting as like, as I’m moving through the space, how I’m changing the shape of that space around me. And uh, so yeah, it feels like sometimes—maybe this seems a little bit lofty, uh, and woo-woo, but I really believe that we collaborate with space that way, energetically, and um, so yeah.

Where something is shot, it can have a huge bearing on—on getting your mindset into the right space. Just one less thing that you have to pretend. One less suspension of disbelief. You’re just like, “Okay, I’m actually here.”

And um, especially once they put the production design onto the

place, too. Like, in *A Girl Walks Home At Night*, once they graffitied Farsi writing on all of the walls, and put up the sort of propaganda posters that we had custom made for the movie, then I really felt like I was in Iran as well. So, it's the only thing is like, "We're in California, so—" *[Laughs]* But, um, yeah.

00:31:20 April Host Um, so something that I think could be a nightmare for an actor, something I'm gonna bring up, so brace yourself. *[Laughs.]*

00:31:28 Sheila Guest Okay. There's so many nightmares. I'm like, "Which one is she gonna choose?"

00:31:31 April Host You're like, "Oooh." Um, because um, Frederic Tuten and Żuławski ended up writing out a complete character after it was already on set.

00:31:44 Sheila Guest *[Mournfully]* Nooo!

00:31:45 April Host Mm, that's a nightmare!

[Sheila laughs.]

Okay, so this was the process, according to Żuławski. He said, quote, "I don't necessarily write a film as a film. I write something, and it becomes a film up to the last moment when you pick this actor, not that actor. It asks for some sort of work in it. Usually the work is trimming, though, cutting the branches and leaving the main lines of foliage. During this act of cutting, this Abe character—Anna's ex-husband—was left in the story. It seemed to me even during the shooting though, it tries to explain too much, why she was with this older man who was a writer. Fortunately, a German actor was supposed to be Abe, and I understood immediately upon seeing him, he was not Abe. And it was a happy coincidence, because his character didn't serve the clarity of the film. He was useless for a surrealistic and clean quality of the film, which asked for much cutting. All that remains of Abe's character now is his wife." End quote.

So, for me, that seems like a nightmare of like, you get to set and someone's just like, "Actually, first off, you were never right for the part, and secondly like, it's not good for the story. So, like, go home." *[Laughs.]*

00:32:52 Sheila Guest Aw. So, did he—did they film any of him doing it, or not even?

00:32:55 April Host Mm-mm. Not even.

00:32:56 Sheila Guest Oh, my god.

00:32:57 April Host Yeah, because what ended up happening was Żuławski then called Frederic Tuten and—'cause, he was—he was in Paris, and was just like, "You need to get to Berlin right away." And for about a week and a half they were rewriting on set to kind of piece together what the story would be, and to—to make it hang together still without this character. Um, so they were doing rewrites, you know, kind of while they were shooting and in prep, and uh...

00:33:26 Sheila Guest Yeah, that's tough. That's so tough. 'Cause I mean, on the one

hand I'm like, I'm glad he did cut that character, 'cause there's so much going on in the movie already. I think another storyline might have muddied it up. But on the other hand, like... and I'm trying to think. I think it might be a little less painful to at least not have performed at all before your part gets cut. 'Cause what's happened to me a lot, and it's just a common thing, is you do the work and then it ends up on the cutting room floor, and then that's when it's a bit of a mindfuck, because it's like, "Oh, was it because of the way that I did it, that it didn't work? If I had done it like this, would it have—would it have worked?" And it's also different every time, like that—it's very common that not everything in the page ends up in the movie, and especially with like, a lot of, I think first time filmmakers, they might overwrite their movie. It's—I know some filmmakers that's just a tactic to overwrite, so they have more to work with in the editing room. They know they're gonna cut some of it out.

And at the end of the day like, of course, of course, of course I respect the creator. It's the director's movie, and the writer's movie, and if they think certain things aren't working, if they think um, things are just detracting from the story that they want to tell, then I understand that it's gotta get cut. But it's—there's not really like, any protocol or system. Even just for like, letting an actor know, I've been in situations—

00:34:53 April Host Yeah, I was curious.

00:34:54 Sheila Guest I have been in situations where, like this poor guy in *Possession*, where an entire character gets cut so you're not even in the movie anymore. I've been in situations where my part gets whittled down to one little thing, or the worst though is when you feel like the way—the things that got cut out do take away from your—your character arc. Or if you don't agree with those cuts, and there's only so much input you can have as an actor, and most of that input ends when the movie wraps shooting. 'Cause you don't get to be part of post at all. Um, you just sort of give all you've got, and then hope that, you know, the right things stick.

And it's kind of part of the job to just be okay with that, but sometimes I do wish there was just a little more—like, I think, you know, for any filmmaker listening to this, like, tell your actor if they're not—if they got cut. Don't—don't have them fly to Sundance and then, find out at the premiere sitting between their agents and managers that they're not even in the movie anymore, you know? Like, that happens. They—filmmakers get scared. They get scared to confront that and tell the actor, and it's like, "You know what? Fuck you. Actually, fuck you." Because like, this person cared so much, put so much work into it, and we're all adults here. You could have the decency—like, you weren't scared to just cut the shit out of my performance, so.

You do, like to a certain degree, you're gonna be a filmmaker, you have to just be brave enough to—to do the job. Like, there's some parts of it that, you know, there are parts of my job I really don't like doing either. But I find it extra painful when they just don't say anything, as though you're not gonna notice that like, half of your

shit's not in the movie anymore. It's like, "Did you think I wasn't gonna—" you know?

So, so for me, I've been in both situations. I've been in situations where I'm not told. It's a complete gut-punch when I see it. And then I've been in situations where like, the filmmaker will write a long letter about—not to say that my shit gets cut all the time, but it has happened before, and um—like, one time I did a film where the filmmakers wrote a long letter to really explain why—why it didn't work, and they were very apologetic about—because they had made a really strong choice, and I committed to that choice, and they didn't feel like it worked in this—in the arc of the full story.

And I really appreciated that. I really appreciated that email, just that—that it was like, "We're gonna take the time to just explain to you why we made this cut, because we know how much you care and how much you put into this." So.

00:37:43 April Host Well, something that we get into a lot, you know, it's like—I think it comes up quite a bit, especially you know, when actors are on—is that, the idea that um, there's not always an open like of communication or respect between director and actor. That we've kind of built a certain type of industry that—that um, you know, kind of disrespects actors in a sense, you know? That there's a kind of abuse, and of course the relationship of a director and an actor is not like, a different—it's not like any other coworker relationship that you're going to find, you know.

00:38:16 Sheila Guest It's a lot more intimate, yeah. Collab—this kind of creative collaboration is always intimate, and yeah. I don't like sometimes when it gets treated like just clock in and clock out and there's no regard to like, the emotional state that you're in or need to put yourself in that day at work. It's like, this isn't just a normal job.

And it depends, director to director, as far as those lines of communication go, but it's so strange to me when they're not more open. 'Cause I'm like, "Don't you want your movie to be the absolute best thing it could be?" Well, that means you're gonna have to get really good work out of everybody, and communication is only gonna help with that, you know?

And protecting your actors, too, like what you said before about Żuławski saying you know, "I feel I didn't protect Adjani enough from what I was asking her to bring." Um, you know, we don't need to be babysat. Like, I would get rid of all of the things, the ways people think that they're taking care of actors, to just have like, some rehearsals.

[April laughs.]

You know, like, you don't need to ever bring me a cup of coffee, I don't need a trailer. But like, if I could get a rehearsal, that'd be sick.

00:39:27 April Host Yeah, just want to know what you want. *[Laughs.]*

00:39:29 Sheila Guest Yeah, like before showing up on set and um—yeah. It's funny, I—

I—but I think it's not just with actors. I think, you know, I think sometimes crew gets abuse too, for sure. Like, I think that there's this—there is this mentality of like, "Oh, you should be happy, you're making movies!" Like, and to some degree we all are. We're grateful to be there. We got a pretty damn good job. You know, we get to just like, mess around all day and like, never grow up. But um, but—I don't know.

It's a professional setting as well, so like, you have to find that balance. It's not just like—[*Melodramatic, mocking tone*] it's not just like the director is doing all of us a favor, because they have allowed us to work on their movie. It's like, "Nah, go fuck yourself." Like there's just a process. Let's like, honor the process. Let's give the process a little bit of space. We don't have to be horrified.

I do sometimes feel like people think like, if you give an actor an inch they'll take a mile, and it's just like, first of all don't lump us all in together. We're all different people who work differently. Um, but I just don't think that's true. I think if you give me an inch I'm gonna take that little inch and I'm gonna like, plant all the seeds inside that inch that I can and try to make the best garden for you out of my soul.

00:40:50 April Host Awww!

00:40:51 Sheila Guest So [*Through mimicked sobs*] appreciate it!

[*Both laugh.*]

00:40:55 April Host You know, and you know, you're talking about communication, and you know, how you communicate with your actor, and rehearsals and things. But I think that like, a way in to talk about *Possession* in that relationship is to talk about that subway scene. And—and exactly like, what went into making that. Because with Żuławski in this moment, he said less was more. And in directing her in that, he really allowed her to do what she could, and this was—this was all her.

And he said, quote, he "instructed her to fuck the air." End quote.

Um—[*Laughs.*]

00:41:37 Sheila Guest Amazing.

00:41:38 April Host And—but he's, you know, like, adding on to that. He said, quote, "It was one time in my lifetime I said almost nothing. Usually you explain, but how can you explain something you cannot understand? How can you explain that out of the ficklety of living in frustrations, instead of talking she does something in the subway. She evacuates this evil, like menstruation blood. She evacuates something she doesn't even know she has in herself. Once evacuated be it in words or action, it becomes flesh and blood and starts its own independent life and it kills. I dare you to give a coherent explanation of the thing, and I dare myself to give a coherent explanation of people." End quote.

And there was, you know, in doing the work he was hoping that—

that Adjani would be able to give voice to you know words, uh, through her actions, through this. And just like he allowed her to have control over the scene and I think in a way that, you know, if you're an actor and you wanna act, like that's something, it could be really great or really frightening. *[Laughs.]*

00:42:44 Sheila Guest Yeah, I sometimes—I feel like this movie is actor porn for me, because it's just like, I sit there drooling over how big they get to be, how much they're just allowed to go for it and that scene is like, the epitome of that. It's a little hilarious he said less is more because there's—

00:43:01 April Host It's everything!

00:43:02 Sheila Guest I don't think she was going for less. It—it's like, it's so explosive, that, that moment. But something like “fuck the air,” like you have to sometimes think outside of the box in that way. I love that he was able to just tell her something that wasn't about emotions. So often in, especially for women, on screen it's like, “Cry, just cry, like *[Mockingly]* the more you cry, the better you are,” and I just think it's kind of bullshit. It's like, I—I think people, it happens so often where like it's just an actress cries and she's “brilliant”. It's like, I don't know. Like, if I felt soul in it, maybe.

But I—I appreciate that instead of going for something result oriented like, “I want you to cry or scream or do”, he said, “Fuck the air.” It—it was more about something kind of gestural and physical and let whatever's gonna come out of you come out. Like that—that's why this movie feels like experimental theatre to me. It's just—it's so refreshing. Like, I can't tell you how often I have acted where I feel like I'm doing nothing. Like I'm instructed essentially to just not move my face, and speak as like, *[Whispering]* quietly as possible. And it's so natural, it's so believable.

[April laughs.]

It's like, I want to fucking explode. I just want—I'm like, “God, I just want to act with all of my heart and soul!” And that's what they do in this movie. And yeah, him giving her that ownership of like—that should happen—I mean, again, it's like, it's so case-by-case. There are times where I've been really meticulously directed and it's been incredible. I've been like, “Oh my god, I feel like I don't have to do any of the work. The director is just crafting me like clay, and if I trust them and it turns out good, it's wonderful.”

00:44:46 Sheila Guest There's also been times where that has burned me, and I have trusted the director and they've been so micromanage-y about my performance that I feel suffocated. And I'm like, “God, there's nothing organic anymore happening. Like, I'm not playing, I'm just like a computer or something.” And so it can—it can work sometimes, and other times it can't. But it's nice to just get let off the leash sometimes. Just say, “Hey, see what happens.”

That whatever you're feeling is valid. Because you spend so much time inside of the psyche of this character. You—and then sometimes it's like, “Ugh, I spent all of this work thinking about this

character and fleshing them out, and then I just kind of show up and robotically say these memorized lines.”

Like, you—in theater you get more opportunities to kind of play ball, you know, to just like, say the line differently each time, because you’re like, “Well, tomorrow I’ll have another performance. I can switch it. If that didn’t work, I’ll do something else.” But in film—

- 00:45:44 April Host Yeah, and you don’t have a camera person who’s trying to pull focus on you while you’re moving back and forth in the space too, yeah.
- 00:45:51 Sheila Guest Yeah, but like, that scene in the subway, like that might have never happened, and it’s so iconic now. Like you said, it’s even like, people make memes out of it, it’s all over the internet, because it’s so insane and explosive. But I think that probably happened because he—he let her—he let her go a little bit. He let her just feel what she was feeling. And that’s when—you have to take those—I think some of the most magical moments in cinema come from these spontaneous kind of improvised moments. They’re—I can bring up a couple I’ve done in my films where I’m like, “Oh, I’m so glad that made it in.”
- 00:46:30 April Host Well, like what? What’s the—what’s the favorite?
- 00:46:31 Sheila Guest Um, there’s a moment actually in *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* in that famous kind of disco ball scene, where the disco ball is going, and it’s like this really, really slow scene between the vampire, The Girl, and Arash, the boy. And there’s no words in it, and we were directed to move as slowly as possible, which is also so wonderful, ‘cause usually everything’s like, “Pick up the cues, talk faster, move faster!” It’s like, everything’s catered to this ADD world we live in.

But Ana Lily—Lily is what I call her, she goes by Lily sometimes—but anyways, Lily was like, “Just move as slowly as you want.” And anyways, the way it was written was that I was supposed to approach Arash slowly and then put my ear to his heartbeat, and in that moment I was like, “God, for a vampire, a young boy on ecstasy is like, filet mignon, right?” Like, he’s young, he’s on ecstasy so his blood is like, pumping all the way through him.

And so I really felt in that moment like, she had to consider eating him before deciding to put her ear on his heart and kind of embrace him. And so when I turned, I just had a moment where I ended up slowly tilting his head back, and looking at his neck, and then like, making this decision to embrace him. And that wasn’t written, that was—that was something that just like, came from me, to just tilt his head back.

And it actually became one of the stills of the movie. Like, somebody has it—that still tattooed actually on them, and I’m like, “Woah!” That was just like, me fucking being The Girl and being like, “Wait a second, I have to consider eating him first.” And I remember actually like, I was very nervous to do that, ‘cause Lily is a very—is one of those meticulous directors who’s kind of thought everything

through. And even in the moment, part of my brain was like, “Oh god, am I gonna get in trouble for just kind of—”

[April laughs.]

It’s something small, you know, it’s just like, a gesture, but um... there are other films too, where like, there’s lines I’ve improvised or whatever. But that just felt like, it was this small thing that was like, because I felt the liberty to be in it, and she, when they called cut, was like, “That was amazing, when you did that!” So I was like, “Okay, good.” It’s about like, creating an environment where I think the actors get to do some of that, because then you might get one of these moments where you’re like, “Wow, that was exactly what these needed to kind of like, complete it.”

00:49:01	April	Host	Mm. It was your subway tunnel moment. I love it!
00:49:04	Sheila	Guest	So, in the most like Girl, like subdued—
00:49:09	April	Host	A subdued subway tunnel moment. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:49:10	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:49:11	April	Host	Sheila, I want to thank you so much for coming on the show and talking about <i>Possession</i> and your own life and work, and again, we should remind people that they can see <i>Snowpiercer</i> on TNT on Sunday nights. And that they can see <i>The Rental</i> at drive-ins, uh, select, and then also on VOD, and that starts on...
00:49:31	Sheila	Guest	July 24th.
00:49:32	April	Host	July 24th. Wonderful. And thank you so much.
00:49:36	Sheila	Guest	Thank you, April.
00:49:37	April	Host	And thank you for listening to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . Uh, another reminder, it’s MaxFunDrive, and this is your shot at becoming a member. And uh, we wanted to thank you, thank you, thank you so much. Danke. Kamsahamnida. All of that, all the thank you’s in the world. We cannot create this podcast without you, and you know, Casey’s obviously recovering from a bludgeoning and a stabbing, but he wants to thank you as well.

Again, if you want to join, all you have to do is go to MaximumFun.org/join.

If you want to let us know what you think of the show, you can tweet at us @SwitchbladePod or email us at SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org.

Please check out our Facebook group. That’s Facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters.

Our producer is Casey O’Brien. Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and this is a production of MaximumFun.org.

[Music fades.]

00:50:33	Clip	Clip	Anna: Both staring at me.
00:50:36	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:50:37	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:50:39	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:50:40	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.